

Can You Believe What You See? Where's the Proof? An Active Learning Course Portfolio Workshop at University of Massachusetts – Lowell

Each summer, the UMass Faculty Teaching Center runs three-day morning workshops for faculty development. The summer workshops are popular because they require faculty to develop end products to use in their classes, and there is a small stipend for their work. This summer was no exception; the workshop leaders, Ann, Carol, and Monica decided to repeat one of last year's popular sessions on the course portfolio. However, they would change it to focus on active learning. The workshop became, "The Course Portfolio: Focus on Student Outcomes of an Active Learning Strategy." Nine faculty signed up for the workshop.

The first day, Ann had the group to think of various classrooms and create a list of visible descriptors that would indicate to them that active learning was occurring. From their descriptors, the members of the group were asked to individually develop a definition of active learning. The group shared their definitions, which were compared to Bonwell's definition. In paired groups, the participants were also challenged to brainstorm about solutions to perceived barriers to active learning. Carol had the group identify measurable objectives from their courses and develop a problem statement involving one of their objectives that could be addressed using an active learning strategy. Monica discussed the components of the course portfolio and how the portfolio could be used to transform their teaching into a scholarly product. When the muddy print cards were collected, Ann, Carol, and Monica were a little surprised by one of the written comments, "It appears that active learning is preferred to lecturing."

By the second day of the workshop, the participants were familiar with all of Cyrs 110 different types of active learning techniques and had seen a number of them modeled by the leaders. Carol used examples to show how to relate one of the active techniques to a course objective. The second day's muddy point cards revealed the same comment, "It appears that active learning is preferred to lecturing."

The third day of the workshop introduced assessment techniques, and the finale was a report out of the group members' research projects, their selected action strategies with rational and plans for assessment. The group began to proudly reveal their accomplishments of the three days. When it was Bill's turn to report, he astounded everyone with his comments. "I teach philosophy and do not see how any of this applies to me. I lecture, to my classes and when I lecture, my students are *actively thinking* about what I am saying. Why should I change?"

Questions:

- What would you say to convince Bill that his students' apparent attentiveness was not necessarily active learning?
- How would you convince Bill to attempt a new teaching technique in his classroom?
- What are some simple active learning strategies that Bill could begin until he was comfortable with a classroom innovation?